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Viewing cable 06CAIRO2795, EGYPT: POLICE SUPPRESS DEMONSTRATIONS IN SUPPORT

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06CAIRO2795	2006-05-11 13:53	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Cairo

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2006/05/11/13847/egyptian-police-attack-protesters.html>

VZCZCXYZ0002
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHEG #2795/01 1311353
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 111353Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8066
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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 002795

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NSC STAFF FOR SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT: POLICE SUPPRESS DEMONSTRATIONS IN SUPPORT
OF JUDGES CLUB

REF: A. CAIRO 2761

[1](#)B. CAIRO 2493

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Over 1000 demonstrators turned out in Central Cairo to express solidarity with Egypt's Judges Club (JC) on May 11 as two members of the JC leadership faced another disciplinary board hearing to answer charges of slander after they exposed fraud in last fall's parliamentary elections. After a dispute over legal representation inside the hearing The demonstrators' numbers were dwarfed by security force numbers, which were easily in the thousands. A number of journalists trying to cover the event were assaulted. During a meeting at parliament, Speaker Fathy Surour repeated to the DCM the GOE's line that the conflict is intra-judicial and that the GOE fully supports the principle of judicial independence. The GOE has mishandled today's events - its apparent authorization of violence against demonstrators and journalists is particularly regrettable and likely to come back to haunt it. End summary.

12. (C) A massive security force operation in Central Cairo appears to have succeeded in preventing demonstrators from congregating at or near the Judges Club and the Central Court Complex. Demonstrators from Kefaya, the Egyptian Movement for Change, Ayman Nour's Ghad Party, the Muslim Brotherhood, and various smaller groupings, all mobilized to express solidarity with members of the Judges Club leadership, two of whom faced another disciplinary hearing today to answer charges that they had defamed their colleagues with their allegations of fraud and malfeasance in the fall 2005 parliamentary elections.

13. (C) The demonstrators were kept in check by riot police cordons that sealed off roughly ten square blocks in Central Cairo. Even residents of the neighborhood were prevented from entering or leaving their homes. An Amcit academic contact on the scene guessed that the total number of demonstrators was about 1500, divided into pockets along police cordon lines on the approaches to the courthouse. He guessed that of the 1500, about 800 were from the Muslim Brotherhood and 700 from various secular opposition groups. The websites of Kefaya and the MB each cited "security sources" claiming that 237 demonstrators had been arrested in Cairo.

14. (C) Poloff and POL FSN visiting the scene were hampered in their mobility by the cordons. Well over 100 armored security force trucks were deployed throughout the Ramses Street - July 23 corridor adjacent to the Central Court House. POL FSN witnessed a charge by baton-wielding riot police against a pocket of obviously Islamist demonstrators (several of whom were severely beaten) and got caught up in an arrest sweep, as he and dozens of others were herded into a paddy wagon. He was released unharmed within half an hour, with RSO assistance, after establishing that he was a Coptic Christian passer-by and not a member of the group of Islamist demonstrators.

15. (C) Our Amcit academic contact told poloff he witnessed an assault by "plain clothes state security" on journalists gathered on Talaat Harb Street about four blocks south of the Central Court House. According to our contact, a Jazeera crew was interviewing an activist near a police cordon when a group of demonstrators gathered around to chant anti-regime slogans. Within minutes, a "rapid response team" of dozens of "plain clothes security" arrived at the scene and divided into two groups, one of which charged the demonstrators while the other went for the journalists. The attackers threw the equipment of the Al-Jazeera cameraman onto the pavement and beat him - and then moved on in an apparently systematic way to beat a cameraman from Reuters, and also roughed up a female journalist from Knight-Ridder.

16. (C) Several blocks away, an AP correspondent told us she was knocked over and trampled when a group of riot police charged a pocket of demonstrators. She suffered bruises to

the back, abdomen and head but told poloff she was not severely hurt. She said that in addition to the Jazeera cameraman, she had heard that crews from Qatar-TV and MBC had also been assaulted. "No one has footage - they are clearly trying to prevent anyone from taking pictures of the violence," she stated.

¶7. (C) Meanwhile, at the Central Cairo Courthouse, a separate drama unfolded when Judges Hisham Bastawisy and Mahmoud Mekky reported to the second hearing of the disciplinary board investigating them for slandering their colleagues by exposing elections irregularities. When the two judges arrived at the hearing with a large entourage of legal advisors, they were told by the board that they could only bring with them four lawyers each, and that the board would decide which four could come in. Bastawisy and Mekky deemed the terms unacceptable and humiliating and refused to enter - and instead returned to the Judges Club premises. After several hours of uncertainty, the Supreme Judiciary Council announced that they would postpone the hearing by one week, to May 18, at the request of the Public Prosecutor. (Note: Egypt's Court of Cassation is also expected to hear the appeal of imprisoned opposition leader Ayman Nour on May 18. End note.)

¶8. (C) During a visit by a May 11 National War College delegation to the Egyptian Parliament, DCM raised the Judges Club issue. Speaker Fathy Surour, who took several calls about unfolding developments during the meeting, repeated the GOE line: The dispute is not between the GOE and the Judges but is rather "between the Judges Club and the Supreme Judicial Council." The GOE fully supports the principle of judicial independence, Surour asserted, but the Judges Club's technical disagreements with the Supreme Judiciary Council have been exploited and politicized by other groups, such as the quasi-leftist Kefaya and the Muslim Brotherhood. The DCM pushed back, asserting that both the judges issue and the demonstrations were being mishandled.

¶9. (C) Comment: We do not believe the Supreme Judiciary Council would be taking such controversial and punitive steps against the JC leadership without the full approval of the executive, which appointed its members. The GOE has badly managed today's events, apparently authorizing the use of excessive force to punish and intimidate demonstrators. The apparent targeting of journalists is particularly regrettable and likely to come back to haunt the GOE. End comment.

¶10. (SBU) We believe the Department, if asked, should make clear the USG's regret over today's events and may wish to make a statement along the following lines:

-- We are concerned by the apparently heavy-handed actions of police against journalists and citizens peacefully exercising their right to express their views.

RICCIARDONE